

Origin Story from China

Introduction

China is the most populated country in the world today. It is located in Asia. In ancient times, it was cut off from most parts of the world because of its many mountains. However, this did not prevent the people from developing one of the most advanced civilizations of the time. The Chinese created a sophisticated writing system, and they invented numerous ingenious products such as paper, silk, tea, and seismographs to record earthquakes. The following origin story is first mentioned in a document dating from the fourth century B.C.E.

Origin Story

In the beginning, the world was a lovely place.

A brilliant sun provided warmth and light by day, and the silvery moon illuminated the night. Endless varieties of animals lived in the tree-covered mountains and lush valleys. Gods, Goddesses, giants, and monsters also inhabited the earth.

Nüwa (pronounced NOO-WAH) the Creator was the most important of the Goddesses. She was a lovely creature with the face, upper body, arms, and hands of a human. Her lower body was in the shape of a powerful dragon. Her husband Fuxi (pronounced FOO-SHEE) was similarly formed, and the two were deeply in love.

However, Nüwa was unhappy because she lacked a circle of friends.

Fuxi noticed her sadness and asked, “What is the matter, Nüwa? The earth is a beautiful place, but you seem to find no joy here. Can I do anything to help you, dear wife?”

“Oh, Fuxi, you are a wonderful companion, but I am so lonely without good friends. The giants are really stupid fellows, and I cannot stand to look at the grotesque monsters. What’s more, I have nothing in common with the other Gods and Goddesses.”

“Dear, I cannot deny the truth of what you say,” responded Fuxi. “I, too, find that I am lonesome for good friends. Let me make a suggestion. Why don’t you travel around the earth? Perhaps you will find other beings with whom you can be friends.”

Nüwa accepted her husband’s advice and began her journey. Everywhere she traveled, she saw the beauty and richness of the world. But she found no creatures with whom she could be friends.

Finally she arrived at a raging river in northern China called the Yellow River. There she had an inspiration. “Perhaps I could create a friend of my own! Someone like myself!” she said excitedly. She scooped a large handful of clay from the banks of the river. Carefully, she molded it into a creature like herself.

“I will give you a face just like mine,” she told the clay.

“You will have eyes, a nose, a mouth, and ears. My arms and hands are quite useful, so you shall have those too.”

Nüwa then reached the lower portion of the body. “I don’t think my dragon tail is very practical,” she said. “I’ll give you legs so that you can walk.”

After she had sculpted several clay figures, she breathed into their nostrils. At this, the creatures sprang to life. They danced joyfully around Nüwa. One newly created human happily cried: “You are our mother! We shall honor and respect you for all time! Thank you for creating us!”

“How wonderful it is to have your friendship, my children!” Nüwa exclaimed. “I shall make more of you!” Nüwa began to make more humans by hand. She took extraordinary care with each one, carefully molding the head, face, arms, body, and legs.

One of her new children noticed how hard she was working. “Mother, you look tired. Making us by hand is exhausting you.”

“Yes,” Nüwa responded wearily, “I must find an easier way to create people.” Then she had an idea. She walked to the banks of the river. There, she rolled a piece of rope on the ground until it was completely coated with mud. She then whirled the rope above her head. As drops of mud fell onto the ground, they instantly became men and women.

Later, it was said that those whom Nüwa made by hand were the rich and lucky people of the world. Those whom she made by spinning the rope were the poor and unfortunate.

Nüwa looked at all the humans she had created. She knew that each would grow old and some day die. How could she keep the earth populated with people? “I will teach you the ways of marriage,” she told the men and women around her. “Then you will be able to create your own sons and daughters.”

And that is how humans began to populate the earth.

Stop Here
& Discuss



- Why was Nüwa unhappy before there were humans?
- How did Nüwa create the first group of humans?
- How were these humans different from Nüwa?
- How did Nüwa create the second group of humans?
- According to this story, why are some people rich and lucky and others poor and unfortunate?